



RESERVATION FOR SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES IN WEST BENGAL: MYTH AND REALITY.

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ABSTRACT

The rigidity of caste system in Bengal took place in the medieval period between 1200 and 1500. West Bengal is unique in its societal structure. Here caste plays a decisive role in social, political, economic and cultural affairs of human life. Asymmetrical development is also seen in West Bengal like the whole of India. There are lot of people, whose socio-economic conditions are very advanced. But in the other hand, most are poor, exploited and deprived. Most of the people are agricultural labourers, sharecroppers and marginal peasants. They are called Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people of our society.

The framers of Indian constitution were very conscious about this. They created many safeguards for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people. The First Backward Classes Commission was appointed on January 29, 1953 under the chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar. There are many reservation provisions for them in the Indian constitution under articles- 15, 16, 17, 41, 330, 332, 341 and 342. But the West Bengal's Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe are not receiving the benefits of overall development process. In our state, they are lagging far behind from the upper caste people in politics, education and government service. According to Census 2011, the overall literacy rate of Scheduled Caste in India is 66.1%, which is lower than the national average of literacy rate of overall population (74%). In West Bengal there are 60 Scheduled Caste communities, their total population is 2,14,63,270. Which is comprise 23.5% of its total population (Census 2011). But Scheduled Tribe population is 52,96,963 as per Census 2011. Which is about 5.8% of the total population of West Bengal. Overall literacy rate of Scheduled Caste is 69.4% and Scheduled Tribe is 57.92%, which are lower than of overall literacy rate (77.1%) according to 2011 Census. Their Participation in government service is very low.

However, the development of socio-economic conditions of this class of people of West Bengal has not been as expected. Despite the passing of the 75th years of independence, the socio-economic status of the class of people is far behind from upper caste people of West Bengal.

KEYWORDS: Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, West Bengal, Census 2011.

INTRODUCTION

Indian civilization is one of the oldest civilization in the World. For a long time, different people of the World, such as Aryans, Shocks, Mughals, Pathans have come to India. Some of them ruled and many have stayed in this country in love with the people of this country. Indian society has developed based on people of different cultures and many languages. Indian society is diverse because of the ethnicity coming from abroad to India since ancient times. Due to this variation, not all people of Indian society grew up in the same socio-economic environment.

According to Indus civilization, Indian civilization developed about five thousand years ago. The Aryans began their invasion of India from the north-west around 1500 B.C. Later in the war, the primitive residents were forced to take shelter in the forest. This time the society is divided into four categories according to share of the job. In Rig Veda, there was mention of the untouchable. The later Vedic texts such as Taittiriya Brahmins, Chandiyaga Upanishad considered certain communities not as untouchable. The work of the people of the Shudra class were to serve the other three class of peoples. They had no rights in education and religious fields. In the later period, the fifth varna or out caste was created. In the 1931 census they were addressed as "Exterior Caste". Mahatma Gandhi called them Harijan. According to Ambedkar, they were considered as "Brokenmen" in ancient India.

The term Scheduled Caste was first used in 1935 by the Simon Commission. The first systematic initiative for the interests of the depressed classes was made with the introduction of Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms on the Act of 1919.

The idea of untouchability is specifically important behind the development of caste system. In ancient Indian societies, people of the lower caste were considered untouchable. According to Mahatma Gandhi untouchability means population by the touch of certain persons by reason of their birth in a particular state of family. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said "untouchability is the notion of defilement, pollution, contamination and the ways and means of getting rid of that defilement. It is a case of permanent, hereditary stain which nothing can cleanse.

West Bengal is the most important state in eastern India. It's a part of Vanga or Banga of ancient India. Total area of West Bengal is 88,752 sq km. According to 2011 census total population of West Bengal is 9,12,76,115. 2,67,60,233 of them are Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. They are 29.3% of total West Bengal population. There are 60 Scheduled Castes and 40 Scheduled Tribes communities in our state. Most of are Rajbanshi, Namasudra, Dhoba, Methor, Bagdi, Bauri, Chamar, Kotal, Jhalomalo, Suri etc. Most of Scheduled Castes

communities are Santal, Asur, Oraon, Munda, Bhumiji, Lodha, Birhor, Garo, kora, Lepcha, etc.

Dr. Durga Das Basu said in his book "Introduction to the Constitution of India" - "There is no definition of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Constitution itself. But the president is empowered to draw up a list in Constitution with the Governor of each state, subject to revision by parliament (Article-341-342)". According to Article 341 of Indian constitution- Scheduled Caste means such Castes, race or tribes or part of or group with in such castes, race or tribes as are deemed under article 341 to be Scheduled Castes for the purpose of this Constitution. Under Article- 366(25), Scheduled Tribes means such tribes or tribal communities or parts or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purpose of this Constitution.

Special Provisions for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Indian Constitution:

The Constitution makes various special provisions for the protection of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes:

Article-15,

The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, Caste, sex, place of birth. The use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of state funds or dedicated to use of general public.

Article-16,

There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizen in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state. No citizen shall on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or offence under the state.

Article-17,

(Abolition of Untouchability)- Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

Article-23,

Article 23, prohibits traffic in human beings and beggar and similar forms of forced labour. Majority of the bonded labour belong to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes communities.

Article -29 (2),

No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the state or receiving aid out of the state funds on grounds only of religion, race, Caste and language.

Article-46,

According to Article 46 of Indian constitution- The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the weaker section of the people, specially the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploration.

Special Grants under Article-275,

Article 275 (1) provides that there shall be paid out of the Consolidated Funds of India as grants- in- aid of the revenues of state such capital and recurring sum as may be necessary to enable that state to meet the cost of such schemes of development as may be undertaken by the state with the approval of the Government of India for the purpose of promoting the welfare of Scheduled Tribes in the state or raising the level of administration of Scheduled Areas there in to that of the administration of the rest of the areas of that state.

Article- 330,

According to this article, states that the number of seats reserved in the Lok Sabha shall be in proportion the percentage of the population of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the state. In our state 10 seats are reserved, 8 seats for Scheduled Castes and 02 for Scheduled Tribes out of total strength of 42.

Article- 332,

Reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assemblies of the state. In the West Bengal assembly, 39 seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and 17 for Scheduled Tribes out of overall strength of 294.

Article-340,

According to this article- appointment of a commission to investigate the condition Backward Classes.

Literacy Trend Among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal:

Education is a fundamental component of human development. It is, therefore, a fundamental requirement for the social, economic and political uplift of any community, particularly the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal. A person who is able to read and write with understanding in any language is recorded as literate.

Year.	Total	Male	Female	Gender Gap
1991.		54.6,	28.9,	25.7
2001	59.04	70.54,	46.92,	23.62
2011.	69.43,	84.54,	64.9,	19.64

Source : Census Reports 2011, India

Table- 1, Literacy rate of Scheduled Castes in West Bengal, 1991 - 2011.

Year.	Total	Male	Female	Gender Gap
1991.		40.10,	15.0,	25.1
2001	43.4,	57.38,	29.15,	28.23
2011.	57.92.	74.1.	43.51,	30.59

Source : Census Reports 2011, India

Table- 2, Literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal.

According to census 1991, male and female literacy rate were 54.6% and 28.9% in West Bengal. In 2001, total Scheduled Castes literacy rate was 59.04%. But male and female rate were 70.54% and 46.92% respectively. According to Census 2011, total literacy rate of Scheduled Castes was 69.43%, male rate was 84.54%, female 64.9%

The Gender Gap between male and female literacy shows a decreasing trend in West Bengal. In 1991 the Gap was 25.7% and in 2011 it was 19.64%.

In the other side, Scheduled Tribe male and female literacy were 40.10% and 15% respectively in 1991 in our state. According to 2001 Census, total Scheduled Tribes literacy rate was 43.4%, but male and female rate were 57.38% and 29.25% respectively. In 2011, total literacy rate was 57.92%, male rate was 74.1%, and female rate was 43.52%. The gender gap between male and female

literacy shows a increasing trend in West Bengal. According to Census report 1991 the gender gap was 25.1% and in 2001 it was increased by 30.59%. According to the 2011 Census, the overall literacy rate was 77.08%, with a differential of 82.67% in male literacy and 71.16% females.

This information is proving that, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of West Bengal are lagging far behind from the overall people in educational sphere.

District wise Literacy Rate of SCs and STs in West Bengal, 2001, 2011

Name of District	Literacy Rate 2001		Literacy Rate 2011		Overall Rate	
	SC	ST	SC	ST	2001	2011
West Bengal	59.04	43.40	69.4	57.92	68.64	76.26
Bankura	42.92	43.60	54.09	59.37	63.44	70.95
Bardhaman	51.99	41.83	62.74	54.75	70.18	77.15
Birbhum	45.75	31.20	59.42	47.48	61.48	70.90
Dakshin Dinajpur	51.99	42.82	66.26	57.02	63.59	73.86
Darjeeling	62.43	55.48	72.94	74.26	71.79	79.92
Howrah	61.13	52.06	71.33	70.86	77.01	83.85
Hooghly	56.01	45.45	68.36	60.67	75.11	82.55
Jalpaiguri	61.78	42.59	73.04	58.70	62.85	73.79
Koch Bihar	64.35	55.31	73.57	66.89	66.30	75.49
Kolkata	70.54	76.39	79.31	82.06	80.86	87.14
Malda	51.17	32.16	61.04	46.86	50.28	62.71
Murshidabad	48.91	35.79	62.23	51.34	54.35	67.53
Nadia	63.09	40.63	73.34	57.75	66.14	75.88
North 24 Parganas	70.74	46.09	79.70	64.78	78.07	84.95
Medinipur	54.32	47.97	75.52	62.15	80.16	87.66
Purulia	45.15	42.64	56.07	53.86	55.57	65.38
South 24 Parganas	67.36	43.29	76.31	59.72	69.45	78.57
Uttar Dinajpur	50.66	28.68	62.41	43.76	47.89	60.13

Table- 03

Source: Census of West Bengal, 2001, 2011, Govt. of West Bengal

The table -3 is showing the distribution of literary rate of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population of West Bengal on the basis of 2001 and 2011 census data. The highest Scheduled Castes literacy is appeared in North 24 Parganas (70.74%) in 2001. Kolkata (70.54%) was second position, and lowest in Bankura district (42.92%). While overall literacy rate of this district were 78.07%, 80.86% and 63.44% respectively. According to 2011 census, the highest Scheduled Castes literacy is appeared in again North 24 Parganas (79.7%), second was Kolkata (79.31%), and lowest was in Bankura (54.03%). In the overall literacy rate highest in undivided Medinipur (87.60%), second was Kolkata (87.14%), and third was North 24 Parganas (84.95%).

Table- 3 also showing that, the highest Scheduled Tribes literacy is appeared in Kolkata (76.39%), followed by Darjeeling with 55.48%, and Koch Bihar with 55.31%, and lowest was Uttar Dinajpur with 28.88%, followed by Birbhum with 31.20%, Malda 32.16%, in the census year of 2001. On the other hand in the census year of 2011, the highest Scheduled Castes literacy rate was found in again Kolkata with 82.06%, followed by Darjeeling with 74.26%, and Howrah with 70.86%. Lowest Scheduled Tribes literacy was in Uttar Dinajpur with 43.76%, followed by Malda with 46.86%, and Birbhum with 47.48%. The overall literacy rate of West Bengal in 2011 is 76.26%, and in 2001, it was 68.64%.

This informations are also proving the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of West Bengal lagging far behind from the general Castes of in educational sphere.

Category Wise Enrollment in Higher Education in West Bengal.

Year	Scheduled Caste		Scheduled Tribe	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
2012 -13	161170	115080	28129	20394
2013 -14	181687	135599	32792	24952
2014 -15	193167	148444	36343	27738
2015 -16	189672	152953	33674	28729
2016 -17	196552	163423	36158	30609

Table: 4

Source: AISHE Report, 2016-17, MHRD

The situation of higher education in West Bengal is not much different from other states in our country. Table- 4 is showing category wise enrolment in higher education in West Bengal. According to West Bengal state Higher Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admissions) Act- 2013 reservation applicable to each reserve category, 22% for Scheduled Castes and 6% for Scheduled Tribes under the Act. In 2012-13 session total 2,76,250 Scheduled Castes students enrolled in higher education. While Scheduled Tribes students were 48,523. In 2016-17 session, out of 3,59,975 enrolled students, 1,96,552 were male and 1,63,423 were female Scheduled Castes students. But in this session only 66,767 Scheduled Tribes students enrolled, 36,158 were male and 30,609 were female. In the other side, number of General Castes enrolled students are more than the percentage of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes students.

In Jadavpur University, Kolkata total enrolment of students in 2000-2001 were 7876. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes students were only 1206 and 90 respectively. The enrolment share of Scheduled Castes female was 3.96% and the figure of Scheduled Tribes female students was only 0.39%.

This figure also shown the real picture of higher education of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal.

Reservation in Political Sphere:

The Indian Constitution has made provisions for reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Parliament as well as the state assemblies. This provisions for political reservation was initially for a period of ten years. But ever since then, it has been renewed on a regular basis. Article 330 and 332 make provisions for reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha respectively. The total number of seats reserved in Lok Sabha for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal is 10, out of the total strength of 42. Out of this 10 reserved seats 8 belong to the Scheduled Castes and 02 to the Scheduled Tribes. In West Bengal assembly 56 seats are reserved for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, out of the total strength 294. Out of these 56 seats, 39 belong to the Scheduled Castes and 17 to the Scheduled Tribes.

The Indian Parliament passed the 73rd and 74th constitution Amendment Bill in 1992. These two amendments of the Constitution brought about a fundamental change in the field of local self government. According to the 73rd Amendment Act, regular and timely elections to all panchayati Raj institutions are made mandatory. Article 243D of Indian constitution, seats and offices are reserved for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes including women belonging to these disadvantage groups, at all the three tiers of the Panchayati Raj system. But the 73rd Constitutional Amendment made such reservation mandatory in West Bengal.

After the 73rd Amendment in 1992, the West Bengal's government received seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in three tiers of Panchayat election in 1998. In this Panchayat election of West Bengal, 17,886 Gram Panchayat members were elected. Out of these 17,886 seats, 14,131 belong to the Scheduled Castes and 3755 to the Scheduled Tribes. In Panchayat Samiti, out of 3024 seats, 2410 belong to the Scheduled Castes and 613 to the Scheduled Tribes, and in Zila Parishad Scheduled Castes candidate won 279 seats and Scheduled Tribes won 68 seats.

Reservation in Government Service:

Without job the educational opportunity is meaningless. Job in government service provide a degree of security and prestige. That is why Article 16(4), 16 (4A), 320,335 of the Indian constitution provide services safeguards for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. But the success and improvement of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Government job is not satisfactory. The position of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in teaching and non-teaching posts in the university departments and college of West Bengal is not sufficient.

Various Positions of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal Government Job.

Castes.	Group A	Group B	Group C	G-D
SCs.	7.	14.	11.	40
STs.	3.	04.	07.	16
OBC.	10.	20.	27.	22
General.	80.	62.	55.	22

Table- 5
Source: Field Survey

There are constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal. Out of 22.5% Government job, 15% reserved for Scheduled Castes and 7.5% for Scheduled Tribes here. But after 75 years of independence, they are lagging far behind from the upper caste of people in West Bengal.

There are 29.3% Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in our state. But their share in Government services are very low. Table- 5 is showing that the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes occupy group A, B, C, D job only 7%, 14%, 11%, and 40% respectively. In the other side, Scheduled Tribes people occupy 3%, 4%, 7%, and 16% respectively. But the general Castes of West Bengal hold 80%, 62%, 52%, and 22% respectively. This information is also proving that, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of West Bengal are far behind from the participation of general class of people in Government service.

CONCLUSION

We have celebrated 75th years of independence, but more than 30% of peoples of our country are lagging far behind from the general people. It is not a suitable picture of our country, specially for West Bengal. The main reason for their backwardness are lack of proper educational environment, inaccessibility to good educational institutions, lack of awareness about the utility of education. Negligence of the implementing agencies, specifically the upper caste dominant bureaucracy contributed to failure of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. They need specific opportunities for their better performance in education, politics and employment Sphere.

The following points may be taken into account:

- 1) Measures need to be taken up for increasing representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Government service in West Bengal.
- 2) The pre-examination training is essential for their good performance in educational institutions and government service.
- 3) The percentage of reservation for Backward Classes should be increased in proportion to their present population.
- 4) The government also take necessary action to false caste certificate holders.
- 5) It is essential to stopping the high dropout rate.
- 6) Improving the hostel facilities at primary, secondary and higher education level for both boys and girls students.
- 7) Greater emphasis should be given on the vocational training and skill development programme.
- 8) Loan and credit facilities should be made available.
- 9) The government must maintain the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes cultural and rituals.
- 10) The private sector reservation is necessary for benefit of these people.

If we love everyone, then they also love us. Classification or division of men is not a good sign of a country or state like West Bengal. Thus we protect ourselves.

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